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ABSTRACT

Designed for the instructor in the humanities, this article presents a methodology for the teaching of any film using Walter Colmes's film "The Women Who Came Back" to demonstrate the method. The cinematic code and the response which this code elicits from the viewer are discussed. Specific shots and sequences are cited as examples of various film techniques and narrative structure. (LL)

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# AN EDUCATIONAL APPROACH TO THE CLASSROOM TEACHING OF FILM BASED ON A SEMIOTIC TAXONOMY OF CINEMATIC CODES

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# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to set forth precisely how an instructor in the humanities might undertake the teaching of any film. The approach is simple and goes to the root of film instruction or for that matter instruction in most of the visual arts. I have selected, for this reason, a quite ordinary and even banal film to illustrate a documented method of attempting to make the students "see" what they have perceived all along. It is not even necessary to use this method throughout the film, but in the initial stage of class presentation the teacher must be willing to put in time and effort. In fact, the investigation is so constructed that the teacher may simply use a sequence of the film to demonstrate the critical aspects which then might be readily applied to the whole. The film I have selected as an example is Walter Colmes's THE WOMEN WHO CAME BACK, produced by Republic Pictures in 1946.

The most important element to make clear to the student is the film's unity in cinematic terms that enable character, motivation and plot to fuse together. This may be illustrated through the use of certain filmic conventions that have been firmly established over the years into "codes," and which I will explain further on. Although the film chosen is ostensibly a horror film the application is universal and any teacher familiar with either literature, painting, theater or language arts will find no difficulty in applying such a method to the study of cinema in the classroom, a study basically concerned with the visual signs the medium is called upon to employ.

The teacher would do well to preview the film with a projector that has a stop frame and reverse motion so that he might, as I have done, write down the dialogue and shot sequences that strike him as pertinent. These, when typed, might either be handed out to the class or transfered to a transparency in a thermofax machine so that the students might first enjoy the film through one complete sitting and then, have the feferences close at hand. Another proceedure is to stop the film, go back over certain sequences and lecture from the immediate matter that has just been projected. The disadvantage is that students, high school as well as college, are frustrated by not seeing the picture through and the experience becomes selfdefeating. This might only be done if the film is a well known one and the majority of the class has viewed it more than once. The instructor must not be under the impression that students, especially college people, are rabid movie goers. Film going is today catering to a select audience as many of the other performing arts.

It is impossible to say how much the student will absorbe from the approach I will outline but it is not necessary for the teacher to show many films with this method unless he is interested or the situation requires it, as might be the case in upper grades in high school where attention is more likely to wane than on a college level. If the college or university the teacher is with has a sequential program in film so much the better for the student because the approach that is about to be discussed will be more beneficial if the enrollment of the class is small with students deeply interested.

Finally, if the teacher is proficient, and at the same time cannot keep the film for a couple of classes, it might be well if he illustrated his lecture-discussion with stills of the various shots so that they might also be projected. What I am outlining

Let us begin inductively with the opening of the film and a voice-over, linking the disparate shots(a single continuous portion of film) that dissolve into one another:

1. EXTREME LONG SHOT(HIGH ANGLE): Village and surrounding courtryside.

NARRATOR

Eben Rock is peaceful on the surface...

2. LONG SHOT(HIGH ANGLE): Street scene of village; a horse and cart move up the street from the center of the frame.

NARRATOR

300 years ago it was the scene of the "Black Terror".. The branding of innocent people as witches...

3. LONG SHOT: Church and steeple.

NARRATOR

with the penalty of death by burning at the stake...

4. LONG SHOT: Man sitting at a desk in a crypt going over papers. THE CAMERA BEGINS TO DOLLY INTO him as the narrator continues.

NARRATOR

Reverend Jim Stevens knows this story well for in this crypt under his church are stored many faded documents...

5. CLOSE UP(HIGH ANGLE): A crumpled cocument; a magnifying glass is enlarging the words as it passes over the script; the word "witchcraft" can be detected.

NARRATOR

that bear mute witness to the narrow bigotry of those settlers who brought to the new world dark traditions they escaped in the old...

6. LONG SHOT: A mansion house. THE CAMERA BEGINS TO DOLLY IN.

NARRATOR

nor can the town's people forget because still standing is the home of Judge Elijah Webster...

7. LONG SHOT: Curved staircase in the Webster house. Shadows of the banister supports cast a reflection up to the wall behind so that they give the appearance of prison bars.

NARRATOR

who was responsible for condemning eighteen women to their fiery death...

8. LONG SHOT: A lake at evening.

NARRATOR

and by the shores of beautiful Shadow Lake stands the shrine dedicated...

9. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: TOMB STONE.

NARRATOR

to the memory of Jezebel Trister, who, when burned with her dog at the stake, died...

10. MEDIUM CLOSE UP: Painting of a woman being burned at the stake. THE CAMERA BEGINS TO DOLLY IN to the painting so that it appears in a CLOSE UP.

NARRATOR

screaming that some day she would come back to bring revenge on the man who condemned her.

Once the teacher has been able to list the shots on paper as if he were writing a screen play the pattern becomes more obvious. The camera directions do not have to be described in a technical way unless one wishes the students to become acquainted with the terminology. But let us proceed. What might seem a hackneyed narration in a tone that is quietly sinister but moving in a melodramatic way turns out to be more complex on further viewing. These series of ten expository shots, acting as a terse prologue to the film, serve an iconic function in the grammar of the cinema. By iconic is meant that the image on screen corresponds to the verbal statements enunciated by the off-screen narrator or that the auditory sign represents the objects portrayed by their similarity to that sign. This is one of the functions of the audio-visual <u>découpage</u>[1]

but there is another level on which the signs might be read. The shots and accompanying narration also serve the function not only of uniting disquiparant spaces but of uniting disparate times - for while the narrator speaks of what has passed the images are those that relate to the present(the thematic notion incorporated into the narrative dealing with reincarnation or more spicifically the theory of psychic phenomena where the will of one being might reach out after death to possess the body and govern the actions of a living person). Furthermore, with the exception of the first two shots which serve to establish the spacial confines of the narrative, the remaining shots serve as iconographic touchstones which are reinforced throughout the course of the picture, giving the narrative its particular ambiance:

1. the church and steeple
2. the crypt under the church
3. the document dealing with witchcraft
4. the mansion house
5. the staircase
6. the lake
7. the tomb stone
8. the painting of the burning of a witch

The prologue reaches two high points underscored by the use of the close up(shots 5 and 10). Shots 1 through 4 maintain a reticency between the spectator and the objects viewed. In a tantalizing manner the camera begins to dolly into a shot as a means of connecting the spaciotemporal continuity of the narrative but stops short of further exploration(shots 4 and 6, and to an extent, shot 10 for although it is a close up it does not become an extreme close shot for the size of the image presented). But within the sequence there are a series of shots in contraposition to one another either by juxtaposing sound and image or by a seeming antithesis (if we consider certain codes that govern the way the particular image is to be presented) between the content of the shot and the formal element of its framing which forms a paradigm of the film's

ambivalence: the peaceful country scenes juxtaposed to the marrator's description of the "Black Terror"(shots 1-2), the church and its steeple(shot 3) taken from a low angle at night giving it a menacing appearance, the stately Webster mansion staircase with its deep shadows that are projected against the wall suggesting the theme of incarceration and the beautiful lakeside presented conterminously with the shot of the tomb of a "known" witch. Shot 10 acts as a type of nexus to that of the bus sequence in so far as it presents to the mind of the viewer the ideological connection between the image of the witch in the painting and the appearance of the old woman and her dog in the middle of the road.

In short, the opening series of shots set up a cause and effect relationship within the linearity of the narrative structure so that no image employed in the prologue is not, in some definite way, utilized in the establishment of a type of dream world, a hetrocosm of things only half seen or imagined. The iconographic quality of the images in the opening sequence, however, assume the properties of symbolic signs by virtue of their incorporation within the framework of the entire narrative,acting as referents to indicate objects that take on such significance only latterly(the staircase and its shadows, the painting of the witch and the old lady on the bus). On the other hand such signs as the church which inevitably connote beneficence and holiness become inverted to suggest places of evil and discord; such is the case of the lake which, while beautiful, will yield up the corpses of those who died in the bus accident. Basically, then, what we are dealing with in THE WOMAN WHO CAMBE BACK is a cinematic code which elicits a standard response from the viewer by virtue of the signs that are presented throughout the film. Cinematic codes, that is certain figures or structures that have a fixed meaning, are im-

portant in such a film since the supernatural suggests itself rather than obtrudes. For this reaseon it becomes imperative that certain filmic codes function so that the audience, being sufficiently attuned to such structures through the intuitive process of film going, need not be terrified by the actual presence of the supernatural agencies but be alarmed through the latent construction that these codified images represent. The first 10 shots, therefore, set the audience up to become attuned to these fixed meanings that point toward an éclaircissement but are instead equivocal.

Now that the teacher has the basic modus opperendi of the working of the code, the rest of the article will expand on the educational method of instruction.

Immediately after the shot of the painting there is a dissolve to a long shot of a bus rushing forth on a mountainous curved road. As the bus passes a bend in the road the camera pans screen left to reveal the sign "Eben Rock, 2 Miles" with an arrow revealing the direction. This type of iconographic sign is designated under the species of "diagram" but underlying this is the sign's symboloid features and recalls to mind the opening of the prologue which states that "Eben Rock...was the scene of the 'Black Terror,' the branding of innocent people as witches." This sign is further enhanced by the long shot of a mysterious figure in the middle of the road shrouded in black and taken from the back of the bus driver's right shoulder. Not only have we been prepared by the narrator previously but the sign of "Eben Rock" together with the shrouded figure indicate semiologically the presence of a witch, especially when the harridan attempts to bring her dog on the bus we recall that "Jezebel Trister was burned with her dog at the stake..." It is the indexical signs that betray the fact that the woman is a witch - her old face, her cackle and

habiliment and by the way she announces, "this dog is not an ordinary dog," when the driver refuses to admit the animal on the bus. But our reaction(even before she mentions to the driver and to the heroine, played by Nancy Kelly, who she is) has led us to connect the mysterious old woman to the witch although we have no definite proof of her identity except the existential bond between the signs commonly associated with a witch, features as well as gait, and the object itself(an old lady).[2] To these signs we might add the pound note she hands the driver in place of the thirty cents carfare and when the heroine asks the old lady her name there is a close up of the figure of the witch completely covered in black as she announces her name, then a reaction shot of Lorna Webster (the heroine) in close up as she muses over the name, a reverse shot of the old woman as she slowly lifts up her black veil to reveal her physiognomy, a cut back to Lorna and the beginning of a pan from her to screen right followed by a cut to the toothless old hag as she laughs at the terror her name has instilled in the young girl. When the bus plunges into the water there are a series of cross cuts between the dog running to the disaster and the sinking bus. The sequence ends with the animal moving to a grave site on which monument the camera dollies in and then there is a dissolve to the words on the tomb stone in close up:

> UPON THIS MOUND IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD SIXTEEN HUNDRED FOURTY-FIVE, THE WOMAN JEZEBEL TRISTER WAS BURNED TO DEATH FOR PRACTICING SORCERY AND WITCHCRAFT.

The camera tilts down to the end of the inscription to read:

> BY ORDER OF ELDER ELIJAH WEBSTER, JUDGE OF THE VILLAGE OF EBEN ROCK.

The sequence ends on this iconographic note whch tends, however, to reinforce the supernatural and symbolic element in the character of the old lady. In fact the prologue ended with the portrait of

a witch at the stake while the conclusion of the bus sequence ends with another visual statement on the exact theme: the former being presented in a pictorial image, the latter being illustrated in the form of a written image. They become almost isomorphic symbols - that is, similar in content but different in their physical properties.

There is a slow dissolve from the inscription on the tomb to a blazing fire in the foreground of the frame and the mask of a witch and various demons in the background reciting incantations about the fire, thus acting as a visual bridge between the written inscription and the next sequence. On the movement of the "grotesques" in turning away from the camera a cut is make to reveal the previously miming children before the fireplace in a type of hotel-restaurant. It is Halloween. They stop, gaze to screen left which is accompanied by a pan and a dolying in(still in long shot) to Lorna coming from outside amidst a storm of lightning and thunder. Immidiately one realizes she has survived the accident and that an elipsis in the temporal continuum has taken place. Also the night of "All Hallows" or Halloween has an ambivalency in its connotations. For the old Celtic calendar it was the night of all the witches which the Christian church transformed into the Eve of All Saints but it is also the night of pretense - the night children celebrate by masquerading. There is set up an amphibolic situation within the film's diegesis between the signifier and the signified which are the two parts of a sign: the <u>signified</u> is that which is spoken of and the <u>signifier</u> the means used to speak of it. The day itself is one of mystical celebration or playful masquerading and to this point one might either surmise in the forethought that the entire film is a "masquerade" or pretense in the best of the rationalistic Gothic novels of the 18th and early

19th centuries or that we are dealing here with what is truly supernatural. It is interesting to note that at the conclusion of the film, after the truth is discovered, there is a close up of the same witch's mask worn by Peggy at the beginning of the film but the image here is no longer uncertain but the sign evoked by the mask is once again iconic with the latent symbolism of a "masquerade." The orchestration of the mise en scène dramatically incorporates at its center the person of Lorna Webster as the sight lines of the children and the camera movement are at pains to emphasize. These paratactical devices are necessary in sustaining the film's equivocality. The imagistic and implied cognitive zeugma where a single incident stands in a visual and intellectual relationship to two other terms but with alteration in its meaning, is seen in this last series of shots that take place in the hotel on All Hallows Eve. This same relationship might also be seen in the traquil shot of Shadow Lake with filters to soften the cloud formations followed by an immediate dissolve to numerous bodies being taken from the water and placed by the lake side, covered over with white sheets. The body of the old hag, however, is nowhere to be found and when the dog turns up at the scene the minister(played by Otto Kruger) reports to the doctor(Dr. Matthew Gibson played by John Loder):

> I just remembered, they said that when they found the body of the bus driver that his throat was torn to shreds just as though some animal had...

This verbal reference will later be manifested, à vue d'oeil, when the dog attacks the minister as Jim Stevens walks up the staircase to Lorna's room. At the outset it may be seen that the connection between the dog and the discourse is circumstantial but because we have been trained to view the film in a certain way with their concomitant and ineluctable conventions, the cause-effect relationship that I have spoken of earlier immediately in-

sinuates that there is no doubt as to the dog's identity as a "familiar" in the actions associated with necromancy.

In another sequence we move from an extreme long shot of the Webster estate with the doctor getting out of his car to a dissolve of a doll in a pillory(used as a punishment for those suspected of sorcery) and as the camera dollies back there is a dissolve to a long shot of the object framed by the outline of a curtained window. Only now does one realize that he is in Lorna's bedroom. While she is admonished by the doctor about not letting in sun light, Lorna retorts with: "Matt, you know I can never stand the sun." Within the cinematic taxonomy the statement will take on a more sinister and conspicuous dramatization in metaphoric terms later on which the filmic code has prepared the viewer(a priori)to accept. With the intentional yoking of the figure in the pillory and the heroine, the director wishes the spectator to believe in a reality which transcends the visual and verbal images(i.e., the doll and the words referring to sunlight and finally the black veil that Matthew produces which Lorna claims to have been the old woman's and which the heroine in a state of shock has carried from the wreckage of the bus). The audio-visual images - the signifiers, are immediately codified to induce in the audience a pre-existent frame of reference of which the generic term, "supernatural" becomes the signified. Of course the black veil is there precisely as metaphoric synecdoche detached from the indexical object(the old woman)for in no way, once the prologue has been presented, is the old woman ever a simple representational figure. Even before she speaks we have been given the signs that lead to the conclusion of her "witchery." She is not a figment of Lorna's imagination as the doctor suggests and the veil is there to remind the viewer that she has existed - it

(the veil) becomes part of the visual code which allows the supernatural to become a concrete entity in itself.

The family portraits, hung of the wall facing the staircase, reinforce, through the verbal references made by the housekeeper, Betsy, the evil within the Webster family. As the maid walks down the stairs with the doctor, the camera pans with them in a crain shot:

MAID

(pointing to the portraits as they pass them)

Old Kalab, there, he was a slave trader. He used to make two trips a year to the Gold Coast... Joshua, he is what they used to call a soldier of fortune; fought in every war and when there wasn't any more he started one himself...and then there was Lucius, looks like a pompous banker don't he? Well that's just what he was, only I wouldn't like to count the orphans and widows he gypped. But the prize specimen of the whole bunch...Elijah Webster...now there was a man for you, a regular witch hunting fanatic and a judge at that....

The implication of the monologue is common place enough - the degeneracy of a family throughout history ending with an interrupted account of Elijah Webster's witch hunting, recalling to mind the description in the prologue that Jezebel Trister "would come back to bring revenge on the man who condemned her." The housekeeper's account becomes a kind of metonymic statement(of moral overtones) in which the geneology of the Webster family is equated with corruption and evil as closely as the word "crown" stands for a king.

Immediately after this there is an establishing shot of the Webster house and, as if to reinforce what has just taken place, the angle of the camera is slightly oblique and low so that the mansion(3/4 frontal view from its roof to the second floor) is photographed somewhat on a tilt while dark omnious clouds, taking little more than half the screen space, pass overhead. There is

a dissolve to tall sparsely covered trees moving in the wind against dark masses of clouds taken from a low angle, another dissolve to a different set of trees taken from an even lower angle and more firmly silhouetted against darkening clouds(day for night shots), a dissolve to dusky cloud formations and another dissolve, only slower, to a medium long shot of Lorna in bed with the clouds seeming to surround her or appearing as if she were emerging from out of them. Then occurs the reason for such an elaborate montage of establishing shots. The camera moves from a medium long shot of Lorna to a close up of the black veil on the bedroom floor being moved lightly as if by a breeze. Then comes a medium long shot of Lorna as hse gets up from bed, the camera tracking her movements to screen left where she has been looking in the direction of that off screen space where the veil is. The camera stops, allowing her to be framed in the center of the screen in a medium long shot, then continues to pan with her as she places the veil over her head and moves to the mirror. There is a cut to a medium shot of Lorna looking into the mirror(we see her in profile both the mirror and on screen) and her pulling up the veil as the old woman had done in the bus. This is climaxed by a dissolve in the mirror and we are shown the face of the old lady on the body of the young girl. Lorna screems but denies it when Betsy enters the room. In the fade out we see Lorna clutching the veil. The elaborate series of shots together with the position of the camera act as a material mediator between the signifier(the wind, trees, clouds, house and heroine) and the signified(the supposed take-over of the body of the heroine by the witch)for through camera angle, sound and blocking we are told to expect the unexpected. The face of the heroine emerging from the clouds in the dissolve, the

up the tension and the imitative action on the part of the gril of raising the veil from her face are all constructed so that there is a culmination in the doppelganger-like image in the mirror. The indexical sign, the bond between the two women, as illustrated in the mirror image when the heroine performs a rutual action with the veil becomes also a symbolic sign - that of demoniacal possession. The image of the girl in the mirror, therefore, goes through all three stages of signs, from iconographic to indexical to symbolic.

If the teacher of film is somewhat dismayed by the technical terms used thus far I suggest he or she make use of a small book like Thurston C. Jordan's Glossary of Motion Picture Terminology which is more than adequate for classroom instruction although any other handbook might do.

The next establishing shot also suggests a link with the past that the film uses constantly. The little inn in Eben Rock is significantly named, "Pilgrims' Tavern," with the proprietress'name Ruth Gibson written underneath. With the sign in the foreground and the tavern in the background there is a dissolve to a medium shot of Peggy's doll and the doctor's hands using a stethoscope to examine it as a playful gesture on his part. The doll, as will be seen later, figures prominently in the film, being one of the many proleptic images within the cinematic code, for THE WOMAN WHO CAME BACK is so constructed that even the most trivial objects assume a cause-effect relationship. This type of ideology, that is, a system or structure of filmic representations that lead the viewer to expect an inevitable set of modes of cinematic reality to result from previously given images both verbal and visual, is what enables Colmes's film to maintain a certain amount of tension without there having to be a constant

visual shock. The code provides the subliminal horror in the narrative and yet the director is working in the area of a "transparent cinema" which does its utmost to maintain in its linearity of structure, an easily "readable" set of signs that the students in the class can follow.

When Matthew enters Lorna's house he passes from the sunlit vestibule into the dark of the drawing room where Lorna sits and the effect is quite significant. In a medium long shot he asks: "How can you see to read here? It's pitch dark." Lorna replies: "You'll have to blame that on old Elijah(there is a medium shot of his portrait over the mantel piece). I get my fondness of the dark from him." But as soon as the doctor opens the curtains the flowers which he has given Lorna wither. To add to this the doctor finds Lorna reading The Practive of Sorcery and Witchcraft in New England, the book Elijah Webster had written. Lorna defends her acestor and the belief in witches while the doctor subscribes it to a neurosis that can be helped by psychiatry, but Lorna is momentarily lost in thought as Matt tells her that Jim Stevens, who has been doing research in the crypt under the church, has come up with interesting information on witchcraft.

The next sequence opens with the exposition shot(Long, low angle) of the church looming up against a blackened, cloudy sky with a crosss on the steeple standing in bold relief. This entire section compares favorabley with one of the Val Lewton productions for RKO in the early 40's: there being no dialogue and only a modicum of lines delivered in the off screen voice of Loran as she peruses a document in the crypt dealing with the confession of the witch Jezebel Trister. The sequence, depending again on a pre-established code of film technique imparts a disquieting effect, relying as it does mainly on sound and extensive use of the tracking

camera as Loran moves from her room to the cemetery and thence to the church. Even the spacial relationships among the three locals are somewhat tenuous.

1. LONG SHOT(LOW ANGLE): CHURCH Steeple with its cross silhouetted against a cloudy sky. DISSOLVE TO...

2. LONG SHOT: Dog in cemetery walking about. DISSOLVE TO...

3. MEDIUM CLOSE: Lorna sleeping. The sound of the dog howling is heard and she looks about, finds the black veil under her pillow and pullls it out. She starts to rise from the bed.

4. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna is almost in a sitting position on the bed. Sound of the dog continuing to howl.

5. LONG SHOT: Dog prowling about the cemetery.

6. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna(rear view) gets up from the bed and begins to put on a dressing gown. THE CAMERA PANS with her to screen left keeping her mainly in a medium long shot(profile)as she moves to the left of the frame and then, opening the door, walks out of her bedroom. DISSOLVE TO...

7. LONG SHOT: Lorna; the house is in the background but in the middle of the frame, The gates are in the foreground. LORNA is in midground and opens the gates of the estate. It creeks and bangs shut so that she truns around startled, then walks out of the frame to the right. DISSOLVE TO...

8. LONG SHOT: The cemetery; Lorna is to the left of the frame in the background and heads in a diagonal direction to screen right.

9. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT: Dog's head appears from behind a tomb stone; he looks off to screen left.

10. LONG SHOT: Lorna begins to run in the direction of screen right in a diagonal movement and off the frame to the right.

11. CLOSE UP: Dog; his head moves from screen left to screen right.

12. LONG SHOT: The church; Lorna is coming from the corner of screen left and runs up the steps of the church.

13. MEDIUM SHOT: Dog looking screen right from behind a tomb stone moves out of frame, walking screen right.

14. LONG SHOT: Lorna in the background of the church's interior but close to the left of the frame. In mid-ground are empty pews and the foreground contains a pillar; light shines through gothic windows casting a reflection on the wall. THE CAMERA PANS A BIT as Lorna enters mid-ground by walking through

the pews and turning her back momentarily while facing toward the front of the church. Before she gets to the aisle closest to the camera she turns front forward, pauses to look around. THE CAMERA PANS with her(medium long shot) as she walks down the aisle and STARTS TRACKING as she goes through a door in the back of the church. She pauses on the opening of the door. Moving forward the CAMERA STOPS(long shot)when she stops and she bends down to open the trap door. She lets it fall back with a loud thud and dust rises up. She momentarily turns her head in one direction then in another as if she wonders if someone has heard the noise. Then she begins her descent into the crypt.

15. LONG SHOT(LOW ANGLE): Lorna descending the crypt stairs comes directly toward the camera. THE CAMERA TILTS DOWN as she comes closer to it in her descent and DOLLIES BACK KEEPING IN FRONT of her in a medium long shot, PROCEEDING TO PAN/TRACK FROM RIGHT TO LEFT OF THE SCREEN as she walks through the crypt, pausing at a desk. She lights a candle on the table, looks around and starts to go through papers on the desk(medium long shot): THE CAMERA BEING HELD IN THIS SHOT.

16. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna at the desk. THE CAMERA POSITION HAS MOVED ABOUT 30 DEGREES TOWARD SCREEN LEFT. Front view of girl looking through papers. THE CAMERA BEGINS TO DOLLY to her BUT THEN STARTS TO PAN TO SCREEN LEFT (to the candle on the table)AND TILTS DOWN TO A CLOSE UP of the candle. DISSOLVE TO...

17. CLOSE UP: Candle burned down further. THE CAMERA STARTS TO PAN AND TILT IN A DIAGONAL MOVEMENT TO SCREEN RIGHT TO A LONG SHOT OF Lorna in the crypt examining heavy books. As she throws it down there is the thud of the book in the empty chamber. She begins to advance in the direction of the camera AS IT DOLLIES BACK till she steps behind the desk again(medium long shot). As she walks around the desk the CAMERA PANS WITH her FIRST TO SCREEN RIGHT THEN TO SCREEN LEFT so that she now stands in front of the desk and opens a case with letters in it.

18. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT: Lorna looking at documents. The off-screen voice of Lorna is heard as hse reads:

LORNA(OFF-SCREEN VOICE)

I, Jezebel Trister, do hereby confess that on this day in the year 1645 there appeared to me in the form of a noble gentleman, the devil, I signed with him a compact to which he was to transplant my immortal soul at the moment of my death into the body of a young maiden(THE CAMERA BEGINS TO DOLLY TO A CLOSE UP OF LORNA'S HEAD). This process the devil did promise to repeat in the period of three hundred years(THE CAMERA CONTINUES IN A CRANE/DOLLYING MOVEMENT over the head of Lorna) at which time he would return to claim his own. (CAMERA DOLLIES TO A MANTLE PIECE WITH OBJECTS ON IT). In each life span I would be instructed in the ways of darkness....DISSOLVE TO

19. CLOSE UP: Grotesque figure on mantle piece. THE CAMERA QUICKLY PANS TO a stuffed owl(low angle) while Lorna's voice continues.

LORNA

...by an impure spirit and familiar(CAMERA CONTINUES TO PAN to a stuffed animal)...in the shape of a black hare or goat...

20. MEDIUM SHOT: The dog looking down from the trap door.

LORNA

...or a dog... DISSOLVE TO:

21. LONG SHOT: Stuffed owl(slightly low angle). CAMERA CONTINUES TO DOLLY BACK AND CRANE DOWN. Lorna's head can be seen to the right of the frame in the lower corner as the CAMERA DOLLIES BACK TO A MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT of Lorna before the desk reading the confession.

LORNA

...I was granted the power to summon and call, to cast spells and incantations..."

There is the sound of the dog's bark. Lorna backs away, frightened and knocks over a statue which falls heavily to the ground resounding in the chamber. She turns to screen right.

22. LONG SHOT(LOW ANGLE): Dog framed through trap door, barking and looking down.

23. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna turns to screen left, looks about, turns to screen right. THE CAMERA STARTS TO TRACK with her as she moves to screen right. CAMERA PAUSES with her where she is framed by a baroque metal design in the foreground. She continues to move to screen right and the CAMERA FOLLOWS until she pauses at the bottom of the stairs of the crypt. In the background is the dog still at the entrance to the trap door, growling. He moves away and the trap door shuts with a resounding thud. Lorna pauses a moment and then continues up the stairs.

The teacher might here indicate to the class that although the dissolve invariably indicates a passage of time in cinematic codes, the dissolves in shots 1 to 3 seem to be used in place of cuts from one particularized space to another. Shot 1 possesses that ambiguity spoken of earlier where the symbol of the cross is made to look quite omnious through the use of camera position and lighting while the linking together of disparate spaces (the bedroom and

the cemetery) through the sound of the howling of the dog(shots 2-4) suggests a closer union in the spacial-temporal continuum than is actually portrayed visually. It is difficult to discern where the cemetery is in relation to the Webster estate as it seems just as difficult to determine the location of the church in relation to the mansion and the cemetery since the dissolves from shot 6 to 7 and from 7 to 8 would normally indicate a temporal disjunction between the spacial coordinates, unless it is employed as a purely formalistic technique where the relationship between two shots of dissimilar materials is used to concretize their propinquity. Shots 8 through 13 make a careful practice to establish sight lines in order to connect spaces within the same scene which also aids in the simulation of the natural flow of movement. Shots 14 to 19 make freer application of the camera's fluidity within the narrative space to indicate the interdigitation of this continuum. Only in shot 17 is a dissolve used to indicate a passage of time while the dissolve in shots 19 and 20 are simply a means of bridging a gap in spacial continuity rather than a temporal one which seems a bit primitive (not in the sense that it is particularly awkward but that by the mid 30's the dissolve usually indicated only a passage of time).[3] In shots 19 and 20 the dissolves employed at the end of each of them, moreover, do not effect a visual-temporal change because of the continuity in the off screen narration which maintains the temporal continuum within the series of shots. But the entire sequence is powerful in its evocative quality of presenting an ambiance of the supernatural forces of evil without resorting to cheap tricks. The voice-over segment also acts as another link in a long series of verbal flashbacks(by nature of the document being read) to the sequence in which the old lady attempts

to get into the bus with her dog, the "familiar," spoken of in the document.

From this point on the teacher might wish the students to analyze the film in the method described above. If the school does not have a machine to do so it is well for the teacher to write up the sequences by himself and then allow the pupils, after viewing, to try a similar approach.

After the incident in the crypt, Lorna believes the dead woman is in possession of her body but Matt comforts her and tells her he intends to marry her. Matt as part of the filmic code stands not only as an iconographic signifier but as a symbol of reason. His presence in the film serves as the rationalistic polarity(along with the pastor) which counterbalances the supernatural stance that creates a dialectical tension in the narrative. Matt, at the town carnival, takes Lorna to a booth where, in order to win a prize, the contestant must throw a dart at a doll. The following conversation ensues and the viewer is aware of the polysemic meaning(Peggy's doll, the idea of witchcraft and Lorna's vague apprehension that she is possessed) contained inherently, but unknown to the proprietor in his description of the operation of the game:

1. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna to screen right, Matt to screen left in midground. The man at the booth in the foreground and at the center of the frame with his back to the camera.

NOAH

It's just a new twist on an old idea...

2. CLOSE UP: Lorna, ready to throw the dart stops to listen to the old man.

NOAH

It seems in the old days if you wanted to do harm to someone you would make an image or a doll out of wax or cloth, then you'd stick a pin in the image and the real guy would take sick.

3. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Same as shot 1.

MATT

What do you mean, 'The real guy would take sick'?

NOAH

Why wou'd cast a spell on him. Of course you had to be a mighty powerful witch to do that(He turns in Lorna's direction).

4. CLOSE UP: Lorna.

NOAH

Now take Miss Lorna here. Now suppos'en she was possessed and she winged that doll there - the one that looked like the sheriff. Why the sheriff would die a horrible death.

5. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: The three as in shot 1. Matt is looking at Lorna.

NOAH

Sorry, I didn't mean to...

LORNA

Matt, let's go!

MATT

I thought you wanted to try your luck?

LORNA

I don't think I feel very lucky right now. Please take me home.

Just as the crypt sequence referred to a previous one in the film, this brief series of shots recalls not only Peggy's doll being treated by the doctor as if it were a human being but foreshadows the time when the dog will mangle the girl's doll(made in her image) with the concomitant effect that Peggy will be hospitalized with pneumonia that seems almost diabolically instigated. Also, there is within the five shots a contrapuntal effect of having the interlocutor's facetious tone juxtaposed to close up shots of Lorna with the dart poised in her hand and looking disconcerted. The composition of the shots are formally balanced:

1. tryptic shot
2. Lorna

3. tryptic shot
4. Lorna
5. Concluding tryptic shot

As soon as Lorna is established at the "Pilgrim's Travern," whose owner is Matt's sister, there are a series of "indicators"(for want of a more precise term) which are meant to lead the audience to foreordinate conclusions concerning the heroine's seeming duplicity. If one remembers the first establishing shot of the tavern with its sign one might even here see it put to symbolic use in the second establishing shot of the inn. The sign is now perceived in reverse since the camera is recording the image from its reflection in a lake by the establishment. The reverse image will be symbolized in a series of incidents which themselves expand the thematic content turning the iconic signs into symbolic ones which constitute the paradigm of the reversal within the Narrative structure. "Say, Lorna, wow'd ye like to pose for a weather vane," says one of the customers at the tavern. The object in question is in the form of a witch on a broom stick and the obvious dichotomy between the beautiful heroine and the ugliness of the image she jokingly is asked to pose for is evident. When Lorna feeds Peggy's gold fish with what she believes is food, it turns out that the package is marked "Quick Action Rat Poison," clearly indicated by a skull and cross bones. The minister, meeting Lorna throwing stones which cause ripples in the lake that remind one of the hugh concentric circles occasioned by the bus that has recently plunged into the same lake, remarks:

1. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna in the foreground, the legs of the minister in the right hand corner of the upper portion of the frame.

MINISTER

Beautiful, beautiful and trecherous...

2. MEDIUM SHOT: The minister.

MINISTER

...the lake. Look at it, quiet and peaceful, sun shining on it. You'd never dream that a dozen bodies had been pulled out of there only a week ago...

3. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna, still gazing absently in the direction of the lake.

MINISTER

...Some people are like that, calm and peaceful on the surface but underneath full of dark little secrets.

The verbal image implicit in the statement is the inherent contradiction of what "appears" and what "really" is. The sequence concludes with an interesting transition that will visually enlarge upon the verbal concept.

1. LONG SHOT(REVERSE IMAGE): Lorna and Jim leave the lakeside; we see their images reflected in the still water; she throws a pebble in and ripples begin. A DISSOLVE TO...

2. MEDIUM SHOT: Concentric circles spreading out but becoming rougher as a strong wind causes ripples on the surface. A DISSOLVE TO...

3. MEDIUM SHOT: Rain on the water. A DISSOLVE TO...

4. LONG SHOT: Rain falling before the Webster mansion where the gates are swinging wildly; there is lightning and thunder, A DISSOLVE TO...

5. LONG SHOT: Lorna in the background to the left of the frame sitting in a darkened library with the fire blazing. The storm is heard.

6. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT: Lorna in a wing back chair looking to screen left and holding a book in her hands as she looks down.

   INSERT: Book title - <u>THE ORIGINS OF SUPERSTITIONS</u>.

7. MEDIUM CLOSE(as shot #6): Lorna puts the book up to her mouth. The sound of tapping is heard as though someone were knocking at the window.

8. LONG SHOT: Lorna, half seated in a chair looks about to try to discern where the noise is coming from.

9. MEDIUM CLOSE(same as in shot #6): Lorna intent on reading the book until the tapping resumes. She gets up from the chair and THE CAMERA TILTS UP to accommodate her figure.

10. LONG SHOT: Lorna puts the book down at the table.

11. CLOSE UP: Leaves of the book start turning by themselves.

12. LONG SHOT: Lorna entering the room off the library through an open door upon which her figure casts a shadow. THE CAMERA PANS AND DOLLIES IN BEHIND her as she goes over to the window and in a medium shot is seen to open the window in order to close the banging shutters. As she moves to screen right the frame is almost totally black. As she goes to the door which opens onto the library the rays of the fire place from that room cause her shadow once again to be reflected on the door. THE CAMERA PANS to accomodate her movement. She closes the door behind her.

13. LONG SHOT: Lorna in the library. The CAMERA MOVES SLIGHTLY as he walks around the chair she has been sitting in, but looking down she cannot find the book she has placed on the table. THE CAMERA DOLLIES IN(IN A MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT) to her frightened face. She looks to screen right and THE CAMERA MAKES A DIAGONAL MOVEMENT DOWNWARD to the fireplace where the book is seen beginning to burn in the fire.

14. LONG SHOT: Lorna as she takes the poker to get the book out and stamps on it to put out the fire. She starts to approach the camera looking in its direction but not right at it.

15. LONG SHOT(LOW ANGLE): The shadow, larger than life, of the dog, high on the wall, looking screen left and then turning its head in the direction of the camera as if to discern the approach of Lorna.

16. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna. THE CAMERA DOLLIES AWAY FROM her as she walks to it.

(VOICE OVER - LORNA'S)

...In each life then I shall be instructed in the ways of darkness by an impure spirit and familiar in the shape of...

17. MEDIUM SHOT: Dog. CAMERA PANS with the dog as it moves into the room, looking in Lorna's direction.

(VOICE OVER - LORNA'S)

...a black hair or a goat, or a dog.

18. MEDIUM SHOT: Lorna, looking slightly to screen right, holding a poker she has taken from the fireplace in her raised arms.

LORNA

Go away! Go away!

19. LONG SHOT: Lorna and dog. She is ready to strike him with a poker. From the right of the frame in a deep shot Peggy is seen coming into the room.

LORNA(STILL TALKING TO THE DOG)

Get away from me! Let me alone!

Lorna turns around to see Peggy and the CAMERA DOLLIES UP BEHIND her until both she and Peggy are seen in a profile medium long shot.

LORNA(IN AN ANNOYED VOICE)

What are you dong here? What do you want?

PEGGY

I was on my way home from Shirley's when I thought...

LORNA(IN AN ANGRY TONE WITH POKER STILL RAISED)

What did you think?

PEGGY

If I come home wet mommy will give me the "dickens." She told me if the rain didn't let up I was to stay over night but I had a fight with Shirley and, Miss Webster...

LORNA(IN A SWEET TONE)

Yes, dear.

PEGGY

I better call mommy and let her know where I am.

LORNA

No Peggy. I'll do it.

Lorna exits from the right of the frame.

20. EXTREME LONG SHOT(REAR VIEW): Lorna in the background moving away from the camera in the direction of the telephone; Peggy in the foreground watching her.

21. LONG SHOT(REVERSE ANGLE): Peggy. The shadow of the dog is seen by an open door and then it moves away.

22. EXTREME LONG SHOT(LIKE # 20): Lorna turns from the telephone to the direction of the camera.

LORNA

There's no answer.

PEGGY

No answer? Why?

LORNA(ADVANCING TO PEGGY)

I think the storm must have blown the wires down. You have to stay here for the night.

23. CLOSE UP: Lorna(SLIGHTLY LOW ANGLE). The look on her face seems a bit strange.

LORNA

Here, let me help you off with those wet things.

24. CLOSE UP(SLIGHTLY HIGH ANGLE): Peggy, frightened.

PEGGY

Don't touch me!!

25. CLOSE UP: Lorna, from same angle as in #23.

LORNA

Why Peggy, what's the matter?

26. CLOSE UP: Peggy, from same angle as in #24; she begins to back away.

27. CLOSE UP(SLIGHTLY LOW ANGLE): Lorna.

LORNA

You mustn't be afraid.

28. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Peggy and Lorna. She starts to put her hands about the girl's collar to take off her coat and Peggy screams, running out of frame screen left.

29. LONG SHOT: Peggy, running and screaming out toward French doors.

30. MEDIUM SHOT: Lorna, looking screen left.

LORNA

Peggy!! Peggy...!!

31. LONG SHOT: Peggy opening the door and running out.

LORNA

...come back here!

32. LONG SHOT: Lorna runs to screen left out of the frame.

33. LONG SHOT: Lorna running from screen right to the background of the frame where the French doors are swinging open in the wind and rain. She arrives and looks out.

LORNA

Peggy!!

34. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Lorna Looking out from the open door for a while and finally closing it.

35. LONG SHOT:Lorna, in the background near the closed door, wiping her face from the rain, The dog comes from screen right and drops something from his mouth. Lorna looks down.

36. MEDIUM SHOT: Lorna, in order to observe it more closely moves a bit to get a better look. THE CAMERA SLIGHTLY PANS WITH HER. She is seen looking down with a frightened countenance.

37. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT: Doll. CAMERA ZOOMS IN on the mangled body of Peggy's doll.

(Carnival music recalling the charity bazaar is heard.) DISSOLVE FROM CLOSE UP of doll to...

38. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT: Peggy lying on her bed, sick.

If the teacher has never screened a Val Lewton production I would suggest that he use one of the producer's films as a comparison to this one, or if THE WOMAN WHO CAME BACK is unavailable he might show the class one of the Lewton movies for the sequence just described is analogus to a Lewton production. These 32 shots are prefaced by Jim Stevens's remarks on appearance and reality in the phenomonological world, reiterating what has already been said about the series of reversals in the narrative structure as the film progresses. In shots 1 through 3 the peaceful lake turns into one of turbulence while Lorna herself, due in part ot camera angle and lighting in shots 23, 25, 27, seems to alter her whole physiognomy as if the gentle, beautiful young woman were indeed possessed. Nor should it be thought that in the reverse shots the low angle taken of Lorna and the slightly high camera angle of Peggy's features, are meant solely to convey perspective from different vantage points; they also present a menacing aspect. The panning and dollying of the camera through the rooms to follow Lorna, the sound s of the shutters against the window, and the

shadow of the animal in the room convey a sense of horror without any overt trace of the supernatural. The iconic image of the doll reintroduces a series of incidents in the film that turn the signified into symbolic ramifications dealing with witchcraft. The music at the end of shot 37 links up tow disparate spaces and times(the charity bazaar recalling the game of darts with the rag dolls that so frightened Lorna and the now present interior of the Webster house), while the dissolve from the doll to the prone figure of Peggy not only indicates a time lapse but a connection between the images. Although the director keeps quite rigerously to the spacial continuity through eye trajectories, the end of shot 19 and the beginning of shot 20 do not match for Lorna exiting from screen rightin shot 19 appears to be moving diagonally from the right of the frame in shot 20, but aside from the flaw the sequence is almost parabolic in its rhythmic structure as the duration of shots gradually increases to maximum intensity in length(shot 19) followed by a decrescendo as the temporal duration of reaction shots(20-37)becomes shorter. Then too, the innocent Lorna is made to look guilty not only in the eyes of the viewer but in those of her lover for Lorna has hidden Peggy's doll while telling Matt that the little girl hasn't been to see her. Her lover, however, accidently finds the doll secreted behind the book, THE ORIGNS OF SUPERSTITION.

There is only one more sequence that I wish to describe and which in no sense involves a graphic presentation of the supernatural. Like a Lewton film all sense of an unseen presence is described and defined through the movement of the camera. The sequence involves Ruth Gibson, Peggy's mother.

1. THE CAMERA TILTS AND CRANES UP on what appears to be a blank screen but what turns out to be the back of the altar in the Eben Rock church. While this tilting-crane shot is taking place one can hear the prayers of

Ruth Gibson. THE CAMERA CRANES TO A HIGH ANGLE SHOT. A crucifix is in the middle of the screen in the foreground flanked by two lighted candles;Ruth is in midground and the entire section of pews are in the background.

RUTH

Please, God, of heavenly grace...she's such a little thing to suffer so, People say she's been bewitched. I don't know about these things. All I know is she's sick and something, someone here in EbenRock is in back of it. Whoever it is destroy them. Destroy them before they destroy Peggy and Matt and all of us.

As she walks down the center aisle with her back to the camera there is a wipe from the right to the left of the screen.

2. LONG SHOT: Ruth is seen coming from screen left in a diagonal movement toward the right of the screen. She is walking by a white picket fence. THE CAMERA BEGINS TO TRACK WITH HER and then REMAINS STATIONARY as she turns around to look back. THE CAMERA KEEPS HER IN A MEDIUM SHOT. She starts to walk again after turning her face from frame left, then towards the camera and then to the right. THE CAMERA TRACKS ALONG WITH HER. She pauses again right before the gates of the Webster house and turns around.

3. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: White fence.

4. MEDIUM SHOT: Ruth looking to screen left then turning her head abruptly around so that we see a rear view of her.

5. LONG SHOT: Webster mansion.

6. MEDIUM LONG SHOT: Ruth completing the turn of her body in a 360 degree movement . She runs off to screen right.

7. LONG SHOT: Ruth entering from the left of the frame runs through the woods. THE CAMERA TRACKS HER.

8. LONG SHOT: Ruth running through the woods. THE CAMERA CONTINUING TO TRACK. Although this appears to be a continuation of shot 7 I believe it to be a match cut that is so imperceptible as to give the appearance of a continuous take.

9. LONG SHOT: Ruth running through woods. CAMERA CONTINUES TO TRACK.

10. LONG SHOT: Ruth(front view) is seen in the background entering the court yard of the "Pilgrims' avern."

When Ruth finally enters she reiterates to the guests that she has been followed by some hugh black animal, although it has not at all been seen. The sequence ends when Noah remarks to the gathered crowd: "Mind you, I'm not saying I believe in these things.." and is followed by the off screen howl of an animal. Here, too, Colmes has counterpointed unseen visual elements which might assume a subjective character in the mind of the frightened woman with the universally heard audio component of the dog's cry. The dichotomies do not cancel one another out but exist as audio-visual paradoxes (and even parameters)that are able to be sustained as part of the film's leit motif while extending the spacial dimensions of the "unknown" into the well defined perimeters of the tavern. But it might be wll to return to the entire sequence to examine the way in which the cinematic code functions to create an illusion of "terror.

The first shot is remarkable in that there is no definable screen space but an opaque flat surface, yet this is counterbalanced by the voice over of the woman praying which tends to suggest a space not as yet discerned. Shots 2 through 6 are perfect examples of that Lewton touch - the "presence of the unseen" connecting, through the established modes of eye trajectories, a circumscribing of the spacial bounds of the sequence, incorporating, as it does, the shots of the Webster drive way and a long shot of the house itself. Shots 7 to 9 are really exceptional in their match cutting which perhaps was intended to extend the spacial and temporal duration of the action. In any case the matching is imperceptible enough so as to give the illusion of one continuous tracking shot through 3/4 of a mile of countryside.

Immediately following this sequence is an omnious shot of the top part of the church but taken on a low angle with the camera tilted slightly to the left so that the steeple and cross seem to

be pointed screen right,a suggestion of what is to occur within the church in expressionistic terms for it is here that Lorna is denounced publically by Ruth over the protestations of pastor Stevens. Thus are concluded the various establishing shots of the church throughout the film which, for reasons that already been ascertained, suggest a multiplicity of discordant images associated with our own intuitive notions of the symbolic significance which has been modified and even reversed by filmic codes, altering our perspective of the image and opening up to the viewer an alternate vision of their usual symbolic connotations.

The final reel begins to devote itself to the presentation of the rational explanation of the events in the tradition of the late 18th century Gothic novel but the director manages still to obtain a few thrills as when the dog attacks the minister and a final chase after Lorna as she heads toward the lake, tormented by the unexplained incidents that she is supposed to have been responsible for. Ironically she falls into the lake(from which she was sole survivor at the film's opening) in her attempt to escape from Matt because she has come to accept her guilt. Concomitantly with Lorna's rescue the old woman's body is discovered by the tomb of Jezebel Trister(who, in reality, was never a witch but was forced to confess to being one and thereby the entire chain of supernatural connections involving the old woman and Lorna is broken)where her dog had pulled her corpse from the wreckage after it had floated free. It transpires that she was an escapee from a mental institution and believed herself to be, after extensive reading on the subject, the woman burned at the stake as Jezebel Trister. While the conclusion might seem weak it too can be ascribed to a certain cinematic code where the protagonist conquers the forces of superstition and ignorance. One

must also disregard or suspend disbelief in the aleatoric nature of the narrative elements in the film that are not explained(the wilting of the flowers, Lorna's return to Eben Rock, the fact that her return and the local citizenry's attack on the Webster girl coincides with the 300th anniversary of Jezebel Trister's death).

In short the film more than compensates for the final ten minutes. The traditional "happy ending" from Hollywood bears testimony, as a concluding coding device, to the "transparent" cinema of the majority of mass audience entertainment films that continue to survive, while throughout the film we are given that assurance (through Matt's words and actions) that the two will eventually be united.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]By the term, découpage, I do not refer to the breakdown of the narrative into separate shots before filming, but the breakdown as related to the finished film.

Cf. Noel Burch, Theory of Film Practice, trans. by Helen R. Lane(New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), pp. 3-4.

[2]This indexical sign then becomes symbolic as the old woman is converted into the abstract personification of revenge.

[3]Burch, op. cit., p. 42.